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ABSTRACT

"New wave" instructional theory and approaches are surfacing in dialogues on teaching and learning and in classroom activities of avant-garde instructors. In an adaption and sequel to Toffler's ideas on the rapidly fading industrial age, instruction in higher education needs to be updated with the application of futuristic thinking. To change, it will be necessary to alter assumptions and beliefs about college students and the validity, long-term importance, and durability of the information that is taught--for example, what is important in preparing young people for the high technology space age. The kind of creative thinking about what and how college instructors teach needs to be grounded on the future. Five "new wave" recommendations are to (1) create a responsive environment; (2) design experiential learning activities; (3) develop cooperative learning efforts; (4) foster metacognitive growth in learning; and (5) provide for diverse learning styles and modes of acquiring information and displaying learning. (Seventeen references are appended.) (MS)

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New Wave College Instruction:
Some Thoughts and Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Content area teachers, both at the secondary and college levels, are products of our industrial age schooling. As such, "...they do unto others as they have been done unto..." This paper presents new wave instructional theory and approaches which are surfacing in dialogues on teaching and learning and in classroom activities of avant-garde instructors.

The position taken is that the kind of creative thinking about what we teach and regearing on how we teach needs to be grounded on the future. We need to determine what is important in preparing young people for the high technology space age.

In this presentation the traditional industrial age instructional mode is contrasted with predicted futuristic changes in the roles of students and instructors. The outcomes which are defined as resulting from such changes will result in new wave educational settings. The paper also provides five new wave instructional recommendations and defines, in terms of products, the results of such recommendations. The five categories of recommendations presented are:

- (1) Create a Responsive Environment
- (2) Design Experiential Learning Activities
- (3) Develop Cooperative Learning Efforts
- (4) Foster Metacognitive Growth in Learning
- (5) Provide for Diverse Learning Styles and Modes of Acquiring Information and Displaying Learning

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NEW WAVE COLLEGE INSTRUCTION:

SOME THOUGHTS AND APPROACHES

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"Cheshire Puss," she began rather timidly...
"Would you tell me please which way I ought to go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat.
"I don't much care where," said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat.

- From Alice In Wonderland

I. Introduction

The cat is right, you know. Without a destination it really doesn't matter which way one goes, whatever the journey. In regard to our journey, we are approaching the last decade of the twenty-first century and many think that its time for higher education to think about what future college graduates should be like, and what they will need to know and do.

Such an effort will call for creative thinking and complicated regearing of what we teach, and how we teach. This need could also generate a list of characteristics of future teachers (college and public school levels) which are important in preparing young people for the high technology space age. Without such an effort some believe that we are indeed a "Nation At Risk."

Presented at the Thirty-third Annual Convention of the International Reading Association, Toronto, Canada, May 5, 1988.

Toffler's (1980) principles to define the rapidly fading industrial age, are instructive. This paper is both an adaptation and a sequel to his ideas applied to futuristic thinking about instruction in higher education. To change we will need to alter our assumptions and beliefs about college students, about the validity, long-term importance, and durability of the information we teach. We will also have to re-examine our beliefs concerning the role and responsibility of college instructors, their relationships with future college students and the place and nature of traditional classroom instruction. All the boundaries are moving. They will continue to do so. The question for all of us is, do we want to chart the journey, or just go along for the ride?

II. Traditional Instruction in the Rapidly Passing Industrial Age

Someone once said, "...We do unto others as we have been done unto..." Our colleges, universities, and even some of our teacher education programs, reflect this. Teachers, college instructors and educational institutions are mirror images of a culture and all of its social creations. Our industrial-age college programs, courses, classrooms, and instructional strategies are characterized by rigid requirements, programs fragmented into dozens of separate courses, taught by highly specialized instructors, in tightly scheduled time frames, in dingy, confining and uncomfortable classrooms.

Working at completing a bachelor's, master's or, even worse, a doctoral degree in our rigid bureaucratic universities calls for patience, perseverance, tolerance of institutional paper-work, rules, policies and procedures.

Students shuttle between rooms and buildings on college campuses

barely making it on time to the next place. They feel unsettled and incomplete while their instructors try to "cover" course content usually from one textbook. They are left with the impression that there was only a superficial exposure to an overloaded body of information.

Everything is synchronized. Clocks are in each room, in corridors, bathrooms, and cafeterias. The pace is fast and frantic...Hallways are crowded...one approaches swinging doors with caution..."oops! beg your pardon and pardon me's" are frequent.

University life is impersonal, the routines are relentless, class lectures are tedious, and when sessions end, the campuses are deserted. Most everyone who can, leaves. Some instructors try to care, but there is little to reinforce caring. Neutrality, aloofness, objectivity, and distance characterize the industrial age relationship of faculty to student. Highly trained professionals in separate specialties are rewarded primarily for scholarly work in their disciplines, their reputation and ascendance in professional organizations, through the grants they acquire and the publication of their works.

The instructor-produced course syllabus outlines topics, dates, and related text readings which will be covered. Uniform course requirements, undifferentiated assignments, and expectations are stipulated. Students are expected to be punctual, regular in attendance, up-to-date in text readings, on time in the turn-in of materials, and present for exams. This is a time to learn how to comply, conform, be courteous, subordinate, and subservient. The principles which underlie our institutions are defined by Toffler as:

Standardization, Specialization, Synchronization, Concentration, Maximization, and Centralization.

It should also be stated that the old wave university has not been too bad for some of us. It has been the route for us to have arrived where we are today. It continues to be the route for many others. Some even enjoy the tussle, the struggle, the "high" associated with succeeding, course by course, and hurdle by hurdle. It might even be good for character development. For many, it wasn't what they needed. Many more young students will not be well served in the future by such an institution.

III. Some Predicted Changes

Let's not feel too upset with the way it is for all of us, most everywhere. Things have been like this for a long time, but our colleges and universities are changing.

Some New Wave Outcomes

If "new wave" thinking is accepted, the following institutional changes are predicted: Redesign of college programs (customization, differentiation, individualization, and self-selection of courses of study); changes in relative emphasis within majors (greater exposure to generalists, interdisciplinary thinking, holistic approaches, integrating relevant disciplines, more practicality and application); restructuring of the amount and quality of time utilization in instruction (larger blocks of time, emphasis on depth learning of content over breadth, focused independent study, integration of subject matter into broad and relevant themes, more cooperative learning in small-groups, problem-solving, research, etc.); commitment to the institution's responsibility for improving the quality of

campus life (a new pro-student university atmosphere, improvement of facilities for individual and small group study, research, instruction, interaction, recreation and health); changes in the role and relationship of the university with the community (advocacy, involvement, faculty and student participation in helping, serving, giving); Alteration of the role of the student in making decisions regarding his/her education (new degrees of freedom for making choices, selecting from options, flexibility for independent decisions in programming, study, instruction and learning modes, greater participation on institutional advisory and decision-making bodies, etc.).

The outcomes from such changes include some of the following: (1) a healthier more wholesome quality of campus life; (2) a stronger degree of bonding between faculty and students; (3) a new type of student and faculty affiliation with the institution; (4) a more highly motivated faculty and student body; (5) increased student political maturity with pressures for alternative learning experiences, differentiated program and course experiences and more involvement in active experiential and cooperative learning activities; (6) a new understanding of the processes and techniques for helping students develop independence and responsibility for their own learning, and metacognitive control over their own areas of specialization.

College instructors of the future need to be individuals who can: (1) establish responsive environments in their own classrooms; (2) set challenging and motivationally strong expectations for course goals; (3) see students as individuals operating from a broader background than their in-class performance; (4) treat students as adult learners;

(5) design classroom experiences appropriate to students' developmental stages and needs; (6) accommodate diverse learning styles and interests among students; (7) create in-class situations which foster collaborative work, critical thinking, thoughtful problem solving, and control over the learning process; (8) integrate subject-matter into functionally useful experiences; (9) help students develop perspectives that foster appreciation for and understanding of the nature of human diversity; (10) stimulate career-long intellectual curiosity, independent thinking, and self-direction.

Five New Wave Instructional Recommendations

1. Create a Responsive Environment.

Classroom environments are designed for flexibility of seating, discussion and small-group activities rather than purely for lectures. Refreshments are provided, students and faculty discuss projects in relaxed, informal ways, flexible scheduling of class times, systematic alteration of class schedules with workshops, symposiums, etc., extensive writing and discussion of personal views, background papers defining beliefs, assumptions, biases, points-of-view, etc. Students identify interests which lead to projects to complete for course, etc.

Product: Builds affiliation, trust, security, comfort, belonging, caring, involvement, etc.

2. Design Experiential Learning Activities

With some grounding in subject matter, students learn through both in-class and off-campus experiences. In-class activities include visitors, exercises, case-method,

modeling, simulations, role-plays, critical-incidents, films, video cassette recordings, tapes, etc. Outside-class projects include research projects, observations, interviewing, tutoring, developing tapes, cassettes, field-trips, etc., focus of experiential activities is to apply course content, identify problems, analyze situations, find and justify solutions, make generalizations, etc.

Product: Develops expertness, knowledge of professional tasks, awareness of responsibilities, and understanding of appropriate conduct. Fosters high motivation to acquire basic knowledge, concepts, and skills. Encourages development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication abilities, etc.

3. Develop Cooperative Learning Efforts

The process of small group problem-solving requires instructors skilled in developing and structuring situations, activities and tasks, providing feedback to groups, and blending subject-matter into activities. These work situations involve peer support, team-effort, and verbal presentations (solutions to activities are prepared in either written or oral forms, reports can be duplicated and read silently by whole class and then are verbally reacted to, etc.). Other cooperative techniques include use of panels, mini-debates, reactions to role-plays, group designed examinations, questions, collaborative writing, class presentations, demonstrations and lecturing

by small groups, etc.

Product: Active learning and full participation of team members, growth in all communicative abilities, active learning, increased personal responsibility and sense of control over what was learned, confidence in the process of learning, growth in sensitivity, tolerance, and skill in dealing with diverse personalities, and viewpoints, etc.

4. Foster Metacognitive Growth in Learning

To foster knowledge of the learning process and regulation of one's own learning, students are exposed to a variety of practices which encourage independence and responsible self-direction. They are given options, choices, and alternatives to select from (for course projects and requirements), they are required to provide plans and rationales for their self-selections, procedures for completing projects selected and their own self-evaluations. Role-shifts require students to lecture to the class, lead teams, participate in panels, select from and try out alternative learning methodologies, solve real problems, etc. Tasks must be designed to be developmentally and personally appropriate for individuals and teams.

Product: Students become empathetic, experience a sense of "originship" for their professional acts, and behaviors, develop a feeling of personal competency, a sense of autonomy, confidence and ability to self-direct, self-adjust, and self-manage their own growth and development, they attribute change to their own efforts.

5. Provide for Diverse Learning Styles and Modes of Acquiring

Information and Displaying Learning.

While print literacy continues to determine who succeeds and who does not in old-wave higher education settings, new wave learners require differentiated alternatives for acquiring course information. They need to learn from printed text as well as experience computer assisted learning, computer searches, use VCR's, tape cassettes, etc. to learn from. Options are provided which allow students to make choices from a variety of alternatives as to how information available through print will be acquired (multiple text readings, essays, monographs, novels, plays, newspapers, note taking of film viewing, field notes from observations interviewing, listening to tapes, computer data-base accessing, etc.)

Product: Multi-media literacy, the accommodation of students with diverse learning styles, introduction of individualization into courses, probable reduction in the heavy drop-out rates of college students, etc.

IV. SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

Whatever perspective one might take on higher education today, we are imbalanced in the direction of old wave industrial age beliefs, assumptions, and practices. This is neither good for the college student nor for the future of our society and way of life.

While it is understandable how we reached this particular place, we are at a point of needing to think about new directions in where we want to get to and how to get there. It won't be easy. Teaching is a complex business and altering our institutions' instructional

approaches to educate new wave learners is even more complex. Yet if our institutions do not become more responsive to the needs for change there will be far reaching problems that might not be repairable. A vision of the future by leaders and instructors in higher education is badly needed. Faculty performance via the current reward system might be antithetical to activate the energy and creative behaviors required for change. Our organizations need to become more flexible, experimental, and innovative. Some universities are thinking about this. But until this happens, those of us who teach need to consider the types of recommendations presented here. We need not wait for our leaders to point the way. We cannot wait for our institutions to decide. The future is already here. Our students are asking for and responding well to the approaches mentioned here. The rest will follow. Change is inevitable. Hopefully it will be the right kinds of change. Perhaps you will lead the way.

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